



Department of Justice

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COLOMBIAN COCAINE KINGPIN **SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT**

Tampa, FL – Today, U.S. District Judge Steven D. Merryday sentenced IVAN GONZALEZ-BEJARANO, a/k/a “Flaco,” a/k/a “Omar,” a/k/a “Marino,” a/k/a “Don Ruben,” a/k/a “El Vicino,” to a term of life imprisonment for conspiracy to import and distribute over five kilograms of cocaine. On October 17, 2008, Gonzalez-Bejarano was found guilty following a two-week jury trial.

During the trial, approximately 30 witnesses testified that for at least the last 20 years, Ivan Gonzalez-Bejarano had been engaged in the distribution of cocaine while in the United States and Colombia. Trial testimony revealed that Gonzalez-Bejarano headed an organization that smuggled into the United States approximately 30,000 kilograms of cocaine, which had a wholesale value well in excess of half a billion dollars.

The investigation was the result of a multi-year investigation by the Panama Express South Strike Force. Panama Express Strike Force South (PANEX) is a federally-approved Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) consisting of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the United States Coast Guard, the Internal Revenue Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Joint Interagency Task Force. Operation Panama Express South currently targets Colombian

maritime smuggling organizations responsible for cocaine trafficking throughout the Eastern Pacific to the United States and elsewhere for distribution.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Walter E. Furr, III.